

## 72 *Aggivacchagotta Sutta* To Vacchagotta on Fire

1. THUS HAVE I HEARD. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Sāvattthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s Park.

2. Then the wanderer Vacchagotta went to the Blessed One [484] and exchanged greetings with him. When this courteous and amiable talk was finished, he sat down at one side and asked the Blessed One:

3. “How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The world is eternal: only this is true, anything else is wrong’?”

“Vaccha, I do not hold the view: ‘The world is eternal: only this is true, anything else is wrong.’”

4. “How then, does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The world is not eternal: only this is true, anything else is wrong’?”

“Vaccha, I do not hold the view: ‘The world is not eternal: only this is true, anything else is wrong.’”

5. “How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The world is finite: only this is true, anything else is wrong’?”

“Vaccha, I do not hold the view: ‘The world is finite: only this is true, anything else is wrong.’”

6. “How then, does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The world is infinite: only this is true, anything else is wrong’?”

“Vaccha, I do not hold the view: ‘The world is infinite: only this is true, anything else is wrong.’”

7. “How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The soul and the body are the same: only this is true, anything else is wrong’?”<sup>718</sup>

“Vaccha, I do not hold the view: ‘The soul and the body are the same: only this is true, anything else is wrong.’”

8. “How then, does Master Gotama hold the view: ‘The soul

is one thing and the body another: only this is true, anything else is wrong'?"

"Vaccha, I do not hold the view: 'The soul is one thing and the body another: only this is true, anything else is wrong.'"

9. "How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: 'After death a Tathāgata exists: only this is true, anything else is wrong'?"<sup>719</sup>

"Vaccha, I do not hold the view: 'After death a Tathāgata exists: only this is true, anything else is wrong.'"

10. "How then, does Master Gotama hold the view: 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong'?"

"Vaccha, I do not hold the view: 'After death a Tathāgata does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong.'"

11. "How is it, Master Gotama, does Master Gotama hold the view: 'After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong.?' [485]

"Vaccha, I do not hold the view: 'After death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong.'"

12. "How then, does Master Gotama hold the view: 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong'?"

"Vaccha, I do not hold the view: 'After death a Tathāgata neither exists nor does not exist: only this is true, anything else is wrong.'"

13. "How is it then, Master Gotama? When Master Gotama is asked each of these ten questions, he replies: 'I do not hold that view.' What danger does Master Gotama see that he does not take up any of these speculative views?"

14. "Vaccha, the speculative view that the world is eternal is a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, a fetter of views. It is beset by suffering, by vexation, by despair, and by fever, and it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna.

"The speculative view that the world is not eternal...that the world is finite...that the world is infinite...that the soul and the body are the same...that the soul is one thing and the body another...that after death a Tathāgata exists [486]...that after death a Tathāgata does not exist...that after death a Tathāgata both exists and does not exist...that after death a Tathāgata

neither exists nor does not exist is a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, a fetter of views. It is beset by suffering, by vexation, by despair, and by fever, and it does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbāna. Seeing this danger, I do not take up any of these speculative views."

15. "Then does Master Gotama hold any speculative view at all?"

"Vaccha, 'speculative view' is something that the Tathāgata has put away. For the Tathāgata, Vaccha, has seen<sup>720</sup> this: 'Such is material form, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is feeling, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is perception, such its origin, such its disappearance; such are formations, such their origin, such their disappearance; such is consciousness, such its origin, such its disappearance.' Therefore, I say, with the destruction, fading away, cessation, giving up, and relinquishing of all conceivings, all excogitations, all I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit, the Tathāgata is liberated through not clinging."

16. "When a bhikkhu's mind is liberated thus, Master Gotama, where does he reappear [after death]?"

"The term 'reappears' does not apply, Vaccha."<sup>721</sup>

"Then he does not reappear, Master Gotama?"

"The term 'does not reappear' does not apply, Vaccha."

"Then he both reappears and does not reappear, Master Gotama?"

"The term 'both reappears and does not reappear' does not apply, Vaccha."

"Then he neither reappears nor does not reappear, Master Gotama?"

"The term 'neither reappears nor does not reappear' does not apply, Vaccha."

17. "When Master Gotama is asked these four questions, he replies: 'The term "reappears" does not apply, Vaccha; the term "does not reappear" does not apply, Vaccha; the term "both reappears and does not reappear" does not apply, Vaccha; the term "neither reappears nor [487] does not reappear" does not apply, Vaccha.' Here I have fallen into bewilderment, Master Gotama, here I have fallen into confusion, and the measure of

confidence I had gained through previous conversation with Master Gotama has now disappeared.”

18. “It is enough to cause you bewilderment, Vaccha, enough to cause you confusion. For this Dhamma, Vaccha, is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise. It is hard for you to understand it when you hold another view, accept another teaching, approve of another teaching, pursue a different training, and follow a different teacher. So I shall question you about this in return, Vaccha. Answer as you choose.

19. “What do you think, Vaccha? Suppose a fire were burning before you. Would you know: ‘This fire is burning before me?’”

“I would, Master Gotama.”

“If someone were to ask you, Vaccha: ‘What does this fire burning before you burn in dependence on?’—being asked thus, what would you answer?”

“Being asked thus, Master Gotama, I would answer: ‘This fire burns in dependence on fuel of grass and sticks.’”

“If that fire before you were to be extinguished, would you know: ‘This fire before me has been extinguished?’”

“I would, Master Gotama.”

“If someone were to ask you, Vaccha: ‘When that fire before you was extinguished, to which direction did it go: to the east, the west, the north, or the south?’—being asked thus, what would you answer?”

“That does not apply, Master Gotama. The fire burned in dependence on its fuel of grass and sticks. When that is used up, if it does not get any more fuel, being without fuel, it is reckoned as extinguished.”

20. “So too, Vaccha, the Tathāgata has abandoned that material form by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him;<sup>722</sup> he has cut it off at the root, made it like a palm stump, done away with it so that it is no longer subject to future arising. The Tathāgata is liberated from reckoning in terms of material form, Vaccha, he is profound, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the ocean. ‘He reappears’ does not apply; ‘he does not reappear’ does not apply; [488] ‘he both reappears and does not reappear’ does not apply; ‘he neither reappears nor does not reappear’ does not apply.<sup>723</sup> The Tathāgata has

abandoned that feeling by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him...has abandoned that perception by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him...has abandoned those formations by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him...has abandoned that consciousness by which one describing the Tathāgata might describe him; he has cut it off at the root, made it like a palm stump, done away with it so that it is no longer subject to future arising. The Tathāgata is liberated from reckoning in terms of consciousness, Vaccha; he is profound, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the ocean. 'He reappears' does not apply; 'he does not reappear' does not apply; 'he both reappears and does not reappear' does not apply; 'he neither reappears nor does not reappear' does not apply."

21. When this was said, the wanderer Vacchagotta said to the Blessed One: "Master Gotama, suppose there were a great sāla tree not far from a village or town, and impermanence wore away its branches and foliage, its bark and sapwood, so that on a later occasion, being divested of branches and foliage, divested of bark and sapwood, it became pure, consisting entirely of heartwood; so too, this discourse of Master Gotama's is divested of branches and foliage, divested of bark and sapwood, and is pure, consisting entirely of heartwood.

22. "Magnificent, Master Gotama! Magnificent, Master Gotama! Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overthrown, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark [489] for those with eyesight to see forms. I go to Master Gotama for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Sangha of bhikkhus. From today let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge for life."